

Message Text

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11
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEE BOAT CASES: ETHNIC CHINESE?

REF: STATE 216116 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. WE WOULD ESTIMATE THAT MORE THAN HALF OF THE BOAT
CASE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN MALAYSIA ARE ETHNICALLY CHINESE.
MALAYSIA POLICY ON ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES, I.E. TO REFUSE ENTRY
FOR ALL NON-MUSLIMS, WAS DEVELOPED IN PERIOD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING
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FALL OF SAIGON WHEN MOST REFUGEES WERE ETHNIC VIETNAMESE,

THEREFORE, WHILE IT MIGHT BE CITED BY MALAYSIAN GOVT OFFICIALS AS AN EXCUSE FOR PUSHING OFF BOAT CASES, IT IS NOT THE MAIN REASON FOR THE GOM'S POSITION. END SUMMARY.

2. PROVIDING STATISTICS ON THE ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES POSES DIFFICULTIES, NOT LEAST OF WHICH IS DEFINITION OF A CHINESE IN VIETNAM. IN OUR EXPERIENCE, REFUGEES INTERVIEWED BY CHINESE-SPEAKING OFFICERS WHO USE SOME MANDARIN IN THE INTERVIEW ARE MORE LIKELY THAN OTHERWISE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY, TOO, SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OR HAVE ATTENDED CHINESE SCHOOLS. WE WOULD ESTIMATE THAT MORE THAN HALF OF THE BOAT CASE VIETNAMESE WE HAVE INTERVIEWED COULD BE CLASSIFIED AS CHINESE BY VIRTUE OF THE LANGUAGES THEY SPEAK OR THE SCHOOLS THEY HAVE ATTENDED.

3. THE ORIGINAL WAVE OF REFUGEES AFTER FALL OF SAIGON APPEARED TO INCLUDE A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF ETHNIC VIETNAMESE. ONE CAN SPECULATE THAT THE PRESENT SHIFT IN FAVOR OF ETHNIC CHINESE IS EXPLAINABLE IN TERMS OF THE CHINESE MERCHANT ROLE IN VIETNAM AND THE NEED TO HAVE FUNDS TO OBTAIN A BOAT TO ESCAPE. FARMERS AND EX-SOLDIERS ARE NOT LIKELY TO HAVE THE NECESSARY CAPITAL (ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN A GOOD NUMBER OF NUNG GUARDS AMONG MALAYSIA'S BOAT CASE REFUGEES). IT APPEARS THAT A NUMBER OF CHINESE REMAINED BEHIND AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON TO SEE HOW THEY WOULD FARE UNDER THE NEW REGIME. THEY HAVE FOUND OUT NOW AND ARE LEAVING.

4. THE ETHNIC BALANCE BETWEEN THE RULING MUSLIM MALAYS AND THE ECONOMICALLY DOMINANT CHINESE IS A POLITICAL PROBLEM HERE AND IT IS TRUE THAT THE GOM ONLY ENCOURAGES IMMIGRATION BY MUSLIMS. THUS, THE ETHNIC ORIGINS OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES MIGHT BE CITED BY GOM OFFICIALS IN GENERAL AS AN EXCUSE FOR NOT RECEIVING THEM. (IT HAS NEVER BEEN RAISED WITH US HERE.) THE SALIENT FACTOR, THOUGH, WOULD BE THAT THE BOAT CASE REFUGEES ARE ALL NON-MUSLIMS, NOT THAT MANY OF THEM ARE CHINESE.

5. THE GOM POLICY OF REFUSING TO ACCEPT ANY BUT MUSLIM REFUGEES FROM INDOCHINA DATES FROM SHORTLY AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON WHEN MOST ARRIVING REFUGEES WERE ETHNIC VIETNAMESE. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IF GOM HAD ANNOUNCED A POLICY OF ACCEPTING INDOCHINESE REFUGEES AT THAT TIME IT WOULD NOT ONLY HAVE OFFENDED MUSLIMS BECAUSE IT WOULD INCREASE THE NON-MUSLIM, NON-MALAY POPULATION BUT IT MIGHT ALSO HAVE FOCUSED ATTENTION ON MALAYA-BORN CHINESE (ABOUT 250,000) AND INDIAN (ABOUT 50,000) NON-CITIZEN PERMANENT RESIDENTS WHOSE APPLICATIONS FOR CITIZENSHIP EITHER HAVE BEEN TURNED DOWN OR LEFT IN ABEYANCE FOR YEARS. ANOTHER ISSUE OF IMPORTANCE IS THE MALAYSIAN

DETERMINATION NOT TO OFFEND THE HANOI GOVERNMENT WITH THICH
THEY HOPE TO DEVELOP A FREIENDLY RELATIONSHIP. FINALLY, THE
PRESENCE OF THE REFUGEES PUTS A BURDEN ON RESOURCES AND
POLICE MANPOWER AT A TIME WHEN THE POLICE ARE UNDERMANNED.

6. STILL AND ALL, DESPITE ITS OFFICIAL POLICY OF GIVING FOOD
AND FUEL TO BOAT REFUGEES AND SENDING THEM ON THEIR WAY,
MALAYSIA'S RECORD OF ACCEPTING OVER A THOUSAND CAMBODIANS
AND IN THE EVENT ALLOWING OVER TWO THOUSAND OTHER
INDOCHINESE TO REMAIN HERE INCOGNITO WHILE AWAITING
ACCEPTANCE BY THIRD COUNTRIES IS QUITE CREDITABLE WHEN
CAMPARED WITH HER SOUTHERN NEIGHBORS. FURTHERMORE,
OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE TREATMENT OF THE REFUGEES IS THAT
THEY ARE WELL CARED FOR BY ANY STANDARDS AND A GREAT DEAL
OF SYMPATHY IS SHOWN THEM BY OFFICIALS ON GROUND.
UNDERHILL

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